

Testimony on DCF budget

February 27, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carolyn Goodridge. I have worked in the Child Welfare field for over thirty years, and I have some concerns about the proposed DCF budget.

One of my major concerns is that the legislature came together last year to pass 13-178 to improve children's behavioral health. Public forums were held throughout the state where families and professionals testified about the lack of community services and the disparities between public and private medical insurance. DCF was given the task of preparing the behavioral health plan for the state, which is an enormous task. Now, there are significant changes in the DCF budget particularly affecting behavioral health services: \$69,431 eliminated from Support for Wraparound services, \$500,000 eliminated from Voluntary Services due to increased Insured Population (where private insurance has very poor coverage for behavioral health), and elimination or reduction in Contracted services (which serve our most vulnerable families). The nonprofit agencies serving those families have not had any increased funding in years, and they are now being cut.

Another major concern is the reallocation of the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division's Juvenile Programming to DCF. The Judicial Branch has been handling about 95% of the Juvenile Programming and has the experience in this area. DCF has only been handling about 5%. To transfer another major program to DCF is a concern. DCF has been under a Consent Decree for twenty years because of deficiencies in meeting the needs of children charged to their care. It does not seem sensible to add additional programs to DCF when this decree is still in place. DCF is already a mega-bureaucracy and should not be expected to handle all these major programs.

Another significant change recommended in the DCF budget is to: reinstate licensure of Department Employees as foster parents to save \$40,000. This process was transferred to private agencies to avoid any conflict of interest as a result of a difficult case in the 1990's where a DCF employee's case had covered up some abuse. All private agencies have been under licensing recommendations that no employee be licensed by the same agency for whom they are employed to prevent any conflict of interest, and it seems that DCF should have the same requirement.

It is also concerning that the budget continues to cut Therapeutic Group Homes and Star Homes. We have seen the effects of this when children move from foster home to foster home or spend time in the emergency rooms. Some children will need respite services in a congregate care setting. Although it is best for most children to live in a home setting, moving from home to home creates more trauma and attachment issues for children. The respite programs can provide respite to families so that the same family is able to have the child return to their home.

Thank you for your time.

Carolyn Goodridge

